POULTRY DEPARTMENT.

All communications and inquiries should be addressed to

W. C. STEELE,

Switzerland, Florida.

Success With Homers.

Some of the difficulties in the way of the beginner at squab breeding are very clearly set forth in an article in Poultry. It will be seen that it is not all profit at the start, like every other business, it has to be learned and experience is often a dear school.

We would like to thank you for your Practical Squab Book. It has pulled us out of a veritable Slough of Despond in the matter of squab breeding.

In early June 1903 we ordered twenty-four pairs of "guaranteed mated Homers" from a squab company that may as well be nameless; and paid a good price for them, thinking that we were getting the best. We were told in an accompanying book of directions to put in a standing supply of feed, and, if we could not see to the birds every day they would see to themselves, and various other things of like sort.

However, we never did leave the birds without daily attention; and the Feather, which we were taking in the interest of our poultry, helped us out greatly.

We received forty-six birds instead of forty-eight, and when we reported the deficiency we were told that the company "would send the missing pair with our next order;" our next order has never been sent, it never will be, so we have never had the other pair for which we paid full price. We lost four birds, from canker and going light, immediately upon arrival, but did not lay that up, as it might have happened anywhere; but what we did object to was, that out of the remaining forty-two pigeons, there were just four mated pairs, and just four they remained all summer, by the next fall we managed to learn a little about mating, and by January we had sixteen mated pairs, but the remaining unmated ones broke up the nests and played havoc generally, and we could not tell unmated from mated, as many were alike, and all were so wild that not one would remain on the nests when we entered the house, and so it went on until July 1904 we saw a notice of your book, and procured it. Being gifted with a dogged determination not to be worsted by those pigeons, we set to work to study the book and then the birds (we asked a pigeon expert to come and look at the Homers when we first bought them, and he told us they were good Homers, but that very few of them seemed to be mated); we thought if they were truly Homers we might do something with them.

By this time we had gentled them, and after a pair had raised a set of squabs, and nested again, we caught each one in turn from the nest and banded them in pairs; and when we had so banded all that were nesting we caught all the remaining ones and put them in another house; as we had marked all squabs we had raised it was easy to tell the pigeons we had bought; and there were twenty-nine cocks and thirteen hens in the forty-two birds that had been sold as "guaranteed mated Homers," and one apparently mated pair, proved barren.

By saving squabs in that spring, and selling all the remainder of the year, at the present time of writing we have forty-five mated pairs, and forty-seven grown squabs, with thirty-six others about half grown; for six months they were a dead loss, for six more they scarcely paid expenses, but in the last year they have paid back the loss of the first six months, fed themselves, and still have something to their credit beside the increased flock.

We turned out the barren birds, the cock went off, and the hen stays around as a pet; they would not take care of eggs if they were given them. One of the other original birds died with canker, after the first four, and one I had killed today for going light, breaking up two mated pairs, or we would have had forty-seven; in addition, we have lost four grown young unmated birds in the two years, and not more than the normal percentage of very young squabs, so we feel encouraged.

We owe our measure of success entirely to your book, and have always wished to thank you; we feed and treat generally as you direct; except, and that brings me to some questions. we cannot get Kaffir corn here at all, and no peas except our ordinary field peas, of the black eye or field variety. Sometimes the birds will eat them and sometimes not, our reliance in feeds are wheat, cracked corn and millet; hemp we give occasionally, and rice also.

Now for questions: Where can we get Kaffir corn, and at what price? What is the difference between Canada peas, and those we have, and where can we get Canada peas? Dealers here know nothing about them.

Our market takes squabs simply and ours weigh, at four weeks old, nine and nine and a half pounds to the dozen; what would they weigh if plucked?

Can you tell me anything of Washington, D. C., as a squab market? Here we get three dollars a dozen, but the demand is in the fall, winter and very early spring only; this has not inconvenienced us hitherto as we wished to increase the flock.

Where can we get sweet fern? Have tried drug stores here without success.

We have allowed our young squabs to mate by natural selection, as we can in no way tell the sexes, after they rear or at least to hatch one pair of squabs we transfer them to the mated house; is that as well as we can do?

Ought the loft to have some new blood in it the next season? Would it be wise to buy some young nest mate Homers of this past spring's breeding, and put them with our own young stock to mate in fall?

We use pine needles for nests and the birds like them very much; we have the long leaf pine.

Our birds have been cared for entirely by two ladies and two of three small children, girls; and if we had a better market we feel sure the loft from now on would easily clear $1.50 yearly per pair; as it is they cleared last year, that is from June to June just past, $1. per mated pair, some of them a little more.

Pardon such a very long letter, but you had helped us so much that we wished you to know about it. Wishing you every success.

* * *

It is gratifying indeed to have such plain, candid statements from persons who have gone through the actual experience of starting and bringing a loft of Homing pigeons to a successful termination. It is unfortunate that the shippers of pigeons as squab breeders do not use more care and judgment in the selection and mating of the birds they send out. The statement that birds are mated or paired is not sufficient. Every sale of pigeons for squab producing should carry with them the guarantee that they are mated, working, producing breeders. These three elements should always go with the sale of the birds.

Nearly all of our readers are familiar with Kaffir corn and Canada peas. These two elements of food can be purchased of almost any grain dealers in the country.

Washington, D. C., is not a good market into which to ship squabs during the summer months. The local producers fully supply the demand at this point, from where one-half of the population depart for the summer months.

Any wholesale drug house can furnish sweet fern. We always advocate the advisability of purchasing some strong, young, non-related birds to intermingle with those raised in the loft that are kept over for breeders. Nothing is so advantageous to a loft of squab breeders as the continual introduction of new, healthy blood of the same variety.

Feeding the Laying Hens—The Principles.

We find, in Poultry Success, an article on this subject by Prof. James E. Rice, of Cornell University:

Profitable Egg-Production Depends on Three Factors—Good Hens, Congenial Surroundings, and Suitable Food.

(1) Good hens—This implies an inborn tendency to lay, and great vitality to withstand the heavy drain on the system.

(2)) Surroundings that are congenial—This has to do, first, with physical comfort as provided by a warm, clean, roomy house, with an abundance of pure air and sunshine, and a place to wallow; second, with contentment, which is induced by providing a place free from disturbing influences. To lay well a hen must, first of all, be made to feel at home. Reproduction is based upon a higher law than merely a satisfied stomach. Unless hens feel "happy" no amount of good feeding will induce them to lay. It is because of this law of contentment that many flocks of hens, feeling the privacy, safety and freedom of their unpretentious home, are producing eggs abundantly in the dead of winter, on simple but wholesome food; while many flocks kept in expensive houses and fed most elaborate rations are practically unproductive.

(3) An abundance of the food best suited to produce the greatest vigor of the reproductive system. This applies more especially to hens kept in the best possible health. Other conditions being favorable,suitable food, properly fed, has much to do with egg-production.

The Kind of Food Determines, to a Large Extent, the Character of the Product.

This is true whether it be in the production of meat or eggs. We must realize that the egg is a manufactured product; that it is made from food by a wonderfully delicate process of digestion and secretion, and for this reason there must be a close relationship between the food consumed and the product desired. This is found by chemical investigation to be true. Notice the similarity in composition between the raw materials—the food, and the finished product—the fowl and the egg:

RAW MATERIALS.

	Water, per cent.	Ash, per cent.	Protein, per cent.	Total carbohydrates including per cent. fat x 2 1-4.
Corn	11	1.5	7.9	76.4
Oats	11	3	9.2	56.8
Meat scraps..	10.7	4.1	66.2	31.1
Green clover,	71	2.1	2.9	16.4

FINISHED PRODUCT.

	Water, per cent.	Ash, per cent.	Protein, per cent.	Fat, per cent.
Hen	55.8	3.8	21.6	17
Pullet ...	55.4	3.4	21.2	18
Capon ...	41.6	3.7	19.4	33.9
Fresh egg,	65.7	12.2	11.4	8.9

If we examine the body of a hen we find fat, lean meat and bone. If we examine the food that she eats we discover, in wheat for example, that it contains starch and oil (the carbohydrates of fat-forming material), which is the fat of the grain and which, when eaten by the animal, goes to make heat, energy and fat. We see also little grains of gluten, which might be called the lean of the grain and which, when utilized by the animal, makes the lean meat. We further find the mineral matter (the ash), which might be called the bone of the wheat and which, when assimilated by the animal, makes bone and eggshell. Therefore it is easy to understand why it is that when food is deficient in lime and other mineral matter the eggs are soft-shelled; why a ration deficient in protein produces weak, spindling chickens, or a ration containing an excess of easily digestible carbohydrate matter causes the fowl to become excessively fat. Thus we see the necessity of having properly balanced ration; which simply means that there must be a properly balanced relationship between the food nutritions in the ration in order to produce a perfect animal or a perfect egg. Is it any wonder, then, that a hen whose body contains 21 per cent. of protein, and whose egg contains more than 11 per cent. of the same nutrient, will fail to grow well or to lay satisfactorily when her food is deficient in this particular material, or any other that her body requires?

Knack of Selling Eggs.

The Texas Stockman and Farmer gives some good directions for establishing a market for eggs. We would suggest two other items that would help to gain and hold trade. First, have no cocks with your hens from which you are to sell eggs for table use. Infertile eggs will keep almost indefinitely. Second, get a small rubber stamp and date each egg, every day. In this way it will not take long to establish a reputation which will enable you to sell all the eggs that you can produce at a good price.

Getting the eggs is the only factor in making a success of the egg business. Much depends on finding the best markets. There is always a market for eggs at some price, but between the low level of huckster or corner grocery prices and the "fancy nearby" price in the city there is a wide range. Yesterday in a store on the Boston market I saw eggs offered for sale at 21, 25, 28, 30 and 35 cents a dozen. That is margin enough to make all the difference between success and failure; and yet the man who produced the highest priced eggs has no secret processes and no advantages that others can not have. Any one else who cares to do it can furnish as good eggs, and when it once becomes known can get as good prices.

An unknown man could hardly break into the market and command the highest prices at once because there is a reputation back of those 35 cent eggs. That is also not hard to get. These eggs were strictly fresh; they were of good size and clean, and all were the shade of brown which Boston requires in the highest priced eggs. The 21-cent eggs were all guaranteed good, but they were "floaters" (eggs in which the whites have become soft and watery through age or temperature—two or three days in a hot room will make a floater of a fresh egg). They were also dirty, of mixed colors and some were small in size.

So long as eggs are sold or "traded out" at the corner grocery quality does not much matter and good prices are impossible. The first step is to break away from this custom and ship to the city where quality is appreciated. And yet it seldom pays to ship to the city of the eggs that must be consigned to the commission men, because they are not able to get the best prices. No fancy grocer will attempt to supply his trade from the stuff he is able to pick up on the open market. It is useless also to pay commissions when the eggs can be shipped direct to the man who wants them, and it is a comparatively small mat-